



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

CASE STUDY

Youth Centers Prevent Drug Use, HIV

More than 150,000 of Central Asia's youth have learned about drug demand reduction and HIV prevention from the USAID-supported *Youth Power* program.



Youth Power Center volunteers and visitors in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
Photo by Rob Gray, PSI

One of the biggest challenges facing HIV prevention programs worldwide is how to reach young people most at risk of HIV before they have initiated risky behaviors. The Youth Power model offers a very promising methodology of doing so, thus making a significant contribution to reducing the spread of HIV.

Challenge: In Central Asia, most new cases of HIV are the result of young people injecting drugs. Youth who live along drug trafficking routes running through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan on which Afghan heroin is transported to Russia and Europe are at high risk of initiating injecting drug use and suffering from related problems such as addiction, overdose, and HIV infection.

Initiative: To counteract this risk, USAID supports a network of 7 Youth Power Centers dotting the main drug trafficking routes running through Central Asia. The centers have been established by *Population Services International* as part of the USAID-funded Drug Demand Reduction Program in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the Ferghana Valley Region of Kyrgyzstan. The *Youth Power* Centers work with youth aged 15-25 living in neighborhoods where use and injecting of heroin is common. The centers attract youth at highest risk of becoming injecting drug users (IDUs) and equip them with knowledge and skills to make informed, healthy decisions about drug use and sexual behavior.

At the centers, resources and attention focus especially on young people who regularly socialize with IDUs and therefore are most likely to begin injecting drugs and, as a result, contract HIV. The program also works with young people who have already begun to use or inject heroin. Newly initiated IDUs are at very high risk and HIV prevention programs typically have less than a year to reach them before they contract Hepatitis. *Youth Power* Centers offer young people already practicing high risk behaviors such as injecting drugs referrals to drug treatment, substitution therapy, or other HIV prevention programs.

Results: From 2004 - 2006, the *Youth Power* program provided more than 150,000 at-risk young people with drug and HIV prevention education, constituting more than 70% of the total estimated 200,000 youth aged 15-25 living in the 7 target sites in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. A recent survey carried out in these sites showed significant improvements in youth knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to drug use, sexual behavior, and HIV/AIDS. The ability of Uzbek youth to cite 3 ways to prevent HIV increased from 23% in 2004 to 39% in 2005; more Kyrgyz youth had no misconceptions about the modes of HIV transmission (28% in 2004 compared to 46% in 2005); and the age of sexual debut among Tajik youth increased from 18.7 years in 2004 to 19.2 years in 2005.

By working with young people most at risk before they get involved with drug use, the *Youth Power* Centers are making a difference, helping vulnerable young people throughout the Central Asian region make healthy choices about sexual behavior and drug use in order to avoid HIV and other serious health and social problems.